

Principles from the Lives of the Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs

Osman Nûri TOPBAŞ



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**Principles
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Four Rightly-Guided
Caliphs**

Osman Nuri Topbaş

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THE RIGHTLY-GUIDED CALIPHS

The most exceptional era in human history in terms of virtue, justice, altruism, and ethics was the era of the golden age of Islam. It is called a golden age because Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, whose inward spirit many Muslims understand as the original cause of creation, was alive in the world during that time. The spiritual power of the Prophet shaped the era in which he lived. And it was then possible for great numbers of ordinary people to encounter him regularly and to get to know him well.

The people of that honored age emerged out of the darkness of violent ignorance and made their way to the civilization of peaceful virtue. Then they climbed the peaks of knowledge of Allah. Members of this community are therefore called the Venerable Companions of the Prophet. They were faithful to the Prophet in all matters.

Thus, the Companions are a unique generation. They witnessed the acts and words of the Prophet and passed indications from him onward to all the generations that followed.

Among the Companions of the Prophet, the four successive leaders who guided the community after him came to be known as the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. They were pioneers in the formation of an Islamic identity shaped by the characteristic virtues of the Prophet. They were in love with the Prophet, and so they internalized his qualities of character and his ethics. In this



way their hearts became sacred places where divine love could be found. And their acts and words became good examples for all Muslims.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said about the value of the era of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, “The age of true caliphate after me is thirty years.”¹ The Prophet, by these words, pointed out that the political life of Muslims would deteriorate after that time.

Before deterioration began there was a time of peace and harmony. And the first caliph, Abu Bakr ؓ, played a great role in this.

1 Abu Dawud, *al-Sunnah* 8; Ahmad, V, 50, 220-221.

Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه

(r. 632-634 CE)



Abu Bakr's immersion in divine love was so great that he sacrificed his life. He found himself only in the presence of the Prophet. At each meeting with the Prophet he lost more concern for his own affairs. The more he met with him, the more he wanted to be with him.

Abu Bakr ﷺ

(r. 632-634 CE)

Abu Bakr ﷺ, who became the first caliph after the Prophet, associated himself fully with the Prophet by having great love for him and by being loyal to him. There was a hidden path from the heart of the Prophet to the heart of Abu Bakr ﷺ. The Prophet said in this regard, “I have transferred all I have in my heart to that of Abu Bakr ﷺ.”² Such intimacy with the Prophet was the outcome of great sacrifices. We pay a high price for whatever we love, and the highest price one can pay in this finite life is the price of divine love.

Our master Abu Bakr ﷺ did his best to pay the full cost of loving and being a companion to the Prophet with great joy, so that he could be a close fellow to him. He had the privilege of accompanying the Prophet in his migration to Medina, and during that time they witnessed many divine occurrences together. When, being pursued, they took refuge in the cave of Mount Thawr for three days, many secrets and wisdoms were channeled from the heart of the Prophet into that of Abu Bakr ﷺ, who there gained the level of closeness to Allah. That place became a classroom where Abu Bakr ﷺ learned divine secrets and perfected his

2 Ajluni, *al-Kashf al-Khafa'*, vol. 2, p. 419.



heart so that he received the Qur'anic title *the second of two*, the Prophet being the first and Abu Bakr ؓ the second. And the third was Allah! The glory of creation, the Prophet, inspired Abu Bakr ؓ to enjoy Allah's presence in a continuous manner. That is the occasion when he recited, "*Do not grieve, for Allah is with us.*" (Tawba 9:40).

This episode of divine union in the Cave of Mt. Thawr is considered to be the beginning of the ritual of invoking God's attributes, and also the first occasion of direct satisfaction of hearts by Allah. In mystical teaching, the Cave of Thawr is believed to be the place where divine secrets were channeled from heart to heart for the first time in Islamic history; it is Abu Bakr ؓ who was the fortunate one to be honored with such a blessing. He is, therefore, believed to be the first link in the chain, after the Prophet ﷺ, of the Golden Lineage that will continue until the end of the world.

The goal of all divine journeys can ultimately be achieved only through the love of Allah and Allah's messenger. The precondition of profound love is to love whatever the beloved loves, as well. For immersion in love, we must identify with all aspects of our beloved. And that is exactly how Abu Bakr ؓ proceeded with the Prophet.

"Abu Bakr ؓ is from me and I am from him"

Abu Bakr's immersion in divine love was so great that he sacrificed his life. He found himself only in the presence of the Prophet. At each meeting with the Prophet he lost more concern for his own affairs. The more he met with him, the more he wanted to be with him.

The Prophet ﷺ said one day, “No one has made his property more available to me than has Abu Bakr ؓ.”

Abu Bakr ؓ replied in tears, “O Messenger! Are not I and my property for you alone?”³

The Prophet ended the exchange with a famous blessing: “Abu Bakr ؓ is from me and I am from him. He is my brother in this world and the next.”⁴ The Prophet, by these words, indicated their union in the spiritual world and the connection established between their hearts.

The grand confidant of the secrets of the Prophet

Abu Bakr ؓ became a crystal mirror to reflect the Prophet's heart. Thus, he was the prime example of unconditional surrender to the Prophet's spirituality. Due to such great surrender, everything that belonged to the Prophet had deep significance for him, and so he became the first resource for Companions who sought to discern the true meaning of the words and acts of the Prophet. He truly understood the ultimate meaning of the messages of the Prophet.

The verse, *“This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favor on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion...”* (Ma'ida 5:3) was revealed during what proved to be the Farewell Pilgrimage of the Prophet. Everybody but Abu Bakr ؓ was happy. They all thought the verse was announcing the perfect state of the religion of Islam. Abu Bakr ؓ alone discerned that the verse meant that Allah would soon take the Prophet from them.⁵

3 Ibn Maja, al-Fada'il al-ashab al-nabi, 11.

4 al-Tirmidhi, al-Manaqib, 20.

5 Elmalılı, III, 1569.

During his last illness the Prophet could no longer lead the prayers, for he was too weak to stand. He therefore chose Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه to lead the prayers. One day he felt better and returned to the mosque. After giving advice to various Companions, he remarked, "Allah offered one of His servants a choice between this world and what He has with Himself, and that servant chose what Allah has with Himself."

Upon hearing these words, Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه felt downcast, and wept bitterly. With his wise and tender heart, he realized that this was a farewell speech. Since he was the prime confidant of the secrets of the Prophet, he noticed what others were unable to understand. He began to cry out like a wailing reed, "O Prophet, you are dearer to me than my mother and father! We sacrifice our fathers, mothers, lives, properties, and children for you!"⁶

No one in the congregation was aware that the Prophet was in the mood to leave this world. No one understood why Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه was crying. They asked each other, "Why should this old man cry when the Prophet merely spoke of a person who preferred to go to Allah?"⁷ They did not realize that the servant who preferred to go to Allah when given the chance of staying in the world was the Prophet himself. They were unable to sense what Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه sensed.

The Prophet kept talking, both to console Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه and to tell the Companions to appreciate Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه. "We have returned all favors done us at the same level or a higher one except for the favors Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه has done us!.. He has done so many favors for me that Allah Himself will return his favors on the Day of

6 Ahmad, III, 91.

7 Bukhari, Salah, 80.

Judgment. Abu Bakr ؓ is among those most dedicated to me in companionship and property. If I were to take an intimate friend other than my Lord, I would take Abu Bakr ؓ. But what binds us is the brotherhood of Islam.”

Then the Prophet talked about his forthcoming death: “Let no door leading to Prophet’s mosque remain open except for Abu Bakr’s, as I see a glorious sign over his door...”⁸

So, all doors were closed at that sorrowful time except for Abu Bakr’s. These words of the Prophet meant that the door of special closeness to the Messenger of Allah can be opened only by unconditional loyalty, dedication, commitment, devotion, friendship, and love.

An immovable castle of faith

Abu Bakr’s steadfast and unshakable testimony to the Mi’raj, the great Ascension of the Prophet that was so controversial when first announced, can only be explained by his strong faith. Hadrat Ali ؓ, the fourth caliph, commented about him, “Abu Bakr ؓ is like a mountain that no wind can move.”

Abu Bakr ؓ was one of the richest of the Companions, yet generously gave over his life and property for the Prophet. He offered all that he had to the Prophet many times, and spent in the way of Allah without hesitation and without anxiety about growing poor. Once the Prophet asked him what he had held back for his wife and children. He replied in clear conscience, “Allah and His messenger are enough for them.”⁹

8 Bukhari, al-Ashab al-Nabi 3, al-Manaqib al-Ansar 45, Salah 80; Muslim, al-Fada’il al-ashab al-nabi 2; Tirmidhi, al-Manaqib 15; Ibn al-Sa’d: II 227.

9 Abu Dawud, Zakah, 40.



The Prophet allowed none of the Companions but Abu Bakr ؓ to give away all of his property, for people may be easily be induced by Satan to regret such an act should they face poverty in the future. Such regret may then take away all the blessings of the earlier donations. Abu Bakr ؓ, however, was so immersed in the love of the Prophet that he was like an immovable castle of faith.

In fact, Abu Bakr ؓ did sometimes face poverty and difficulty due to giving all he had to the cause of Allah. Yet such difficulties gave him pleasure, not pain, because it was enough for him that the Messenger of Allah was pleased with him. Abu Bakr ؓ lived in serenity until the end of his life.

The Prophet, therefore, said about him: “Anyone who wants to see a person saved from hell should look upon Abu Bakr. ؓ”

An aura of humility and self-effacement

Abu Bakr ؓ lost himself in the being of Allah and His messenger, and so became a living example of Prophet Muhammad’s morality. He, like the Prophet, ignored his own troubles, and became a prime figure of charity, tenderness, and sympathy. He preferred others to himself. He once prayed: “O Lord, please enlarge my body in hell so much so that no room would be left for others!”

These words indicate how he underestimated himself to the degree of self-effacement. as well as how merciful and tenderhearted he was.

When after the passing of the Prophet, he was elected caliph, he mounted the pulpit to speak to Muslims with exemplary modesty. “O people, I have been elected your leader, although I

am not better than any one of you. If I do any good, give me your support. If I go wrong, set me right...”¹⁰

This great Companion of the Prophet was so humble that he made clear in his inaugural speech that he was open to admonishment by anyone. When people paid allegiance to him, he said, “I have had no desire to become caliph. I have never wanted it from Allah either in public or in private, because I knew that it would mean huge responsibility.”

Abu Bakr ﷺ, became even more humble, modest, and otherworldly after he became caliph than he had been before. Before he was caliph, it was his custom to place himself at the disposal of orphan girls, taking care of their needs and even milking their sheep. After becoming caliph, his neighbors thought he would be so busy that he would change his habits and, therefore, cease his earlier acts. Nothing, however, changed for him. He kept on looking after orphan girls and milking their sheep.¹¹

He had no inclination to worldly glory either before or after becoming caliph. He, like the Prophet, always worked up to live a life in line with the will of Allah, with no worldly barriers to salvation in the Hereafter. One of his wishes before his death was “Sell my land, and pay back to the public treasury all the money I received as salary.”¹²

10 Ibn Sa’d, III, 182-183; al-Suyuti: *Tarikh al-khulafa’*, 69, 7-71; Hamidullah, *Islam Peygamberi*, II, 1181.

11 al-Suyuti, *al-Tarikh al-khulafa’*, 80; Sariçam: *Hz. Ebu Bekir*, 82.

12 Ibn Athir, *al-Kamil*, II, 428-429.



An example of balance and moderation

Abu Bakr's life was based on the divine balance. He always exhibited modesty and humility, but he never showed a sign of abjectness or incompetence. He was serious, but not solemn. He was forgiving, tolerant, sweet-natured, but he was tough and courageous when necessary.

With all these qualities, he never tolerated any interference with the directions of the Prophet. He became a staunch defender of Islam. He never compromised about the precepts of Islam. He managed to defeat the counter-movements that arose after the death of the Prophet, when some tribes proposed to secede from the community rather than pay the compulsory alms to the poor. He said, "I will declare war against anyone who withholds even a scrap of a robe due in alms." Thus he closed all doors that might have led to the collapse of the religion. His decisive attitude as caliph was appreciated even by Hadrat `Umar ؓ, who was known as the epitome of justice and austere character.¹³

The venerable Abu Bakr ؓ lived all his life in loyalty to Islam and paved the way for others to do the same. At the same time, he was a repository of refined spiritual wisdom. His advice and warnings therefore provide us with some valuable principles that may guide us toward the divine realm.

Words of wisdom from Abu Bakr ؓ

"There is no special lineage linking Allah to His creatures. One may draw closer to Allah only through surrendering oneself and following His commandments."

“Allah is not pleased with a servant whose words do not extend to acts.”

“The more one speaks, the more forgetful one becomes.”

“Think twice about what you speak, when you speak, and to whom you speak!”

“Be a slave to the wise who know Allah.”

“Make your true state known to the one who wants to guide you to the right path! Otherwise, you will delude yourself.”

“If you want others to treat you better, improve yourself.”

“Four persons are righteous servants of Allah: the one who rejoices with the repentant; the one who prays for the forgiveness of sinners; the one who prays for the faithful in their absence; and the one who helps and serves those who are in lower positions.”

“The weak among you shall be strong with me until I have secured their rights, and the strong among you shall be weak with me until I have wrested from them the rights of others.”

“Corruption comes when faith is found only in mosques, wealth with misers, weapons with cowards, and authority with fools.”

“The wise fear Allah. Only the unwise are oppressors.”

“In the Qur'an, Allah Almighty mentions the rewards and punishments together so that His servants should prefer to worship and should fear the consequences of acts.”

“If an opportunity for charity escapes you, try to catch it. When you catch it, try to give something more, or something better.”

“Doing people favors saves one from catastrophes and misfortunes.”



“Run away from fame so that dignity may follow you. Prepare yourself for death so that you may be given life.”

“There is always more to any misfortune.”

“Patience is not followed by damage, and anxiety and despair are not followed by advantage.”

“Patience is half of faith, and full commitment is all of it.”

“Pray to Allah for a peaceful life. No one is given anything finer than a peaceful life after full commitment.”

“For me, to be at peace while being grateful for it is better than to be in the midst of trials while being patient through them!”

“The world is the marketplace of the faithful. Day and night are their capital; good deeds are their commodity; paradise is their profit; and hell is their loss.”

“Remembering the Prophet with words of praise wipes out sins more quickly than water puts out fire. Sending greetings of peace to the Prophet with a sincere heart is better than liberating a slave. Loving the Prophet is better than living an ascetic life or fighting in the way of Allah.”¹⁴

“Friends of Allah are of three kinds. Each kind may be known through three signs. The first kind of friend fears Allah. These are always modest; they are always aiming to increase their charity; they always see their small sins as large because they see a divine rule as a divine rule. Friends of the second kind hope for the reward of Allah. They display virtue and beauty in all their acts; they spend bountifully in the way of Allah; and they do not denigrate anyone. Friends of the third kind are the wise who worship Allah with love and compassion.

¹⁴ al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh al-Baghdad*, VII, 161.



They give away what they love most in the way of Allah; they aim at Allah's pleasure in all their acts and disregard the reproaches of the ignorant; and they fulfill the commands and observe the prohibitions of Allah even if their lower selves dislike it.”¹⁵

Abu Bakr ﷺ was a noble and exemplary Muslim who combined all the features of all three of these categories. May Allah permit us to benefit from his wise advice and follow the spirit of his virtuous character! May Allah make us links in his chain of friendship! For with the permission of Allah, the rightly-guided caliphs, the Companions of the Prophet, the friends of Allah, and those who follow them rightly, are the most fortunate of travelers on the divine path.

Let us conclude here by joining the supplications of Abu Bakr ﷺ.

“O Allah! Make the last part of my life the best part of my life, the last of my acts the best of my acts, and the last day of my life the best of my days: the day when I come to You.”

“O Allah! Make the last thing You grant me Your blessing, and a high position in Paradise.”¹⁶

Amîn...

15 Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *al-Munabbihat*, 94-95.

16 al-Suyuti, *Tarikh al-khulafa'*, 103.

Umar رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ

(r. 634-644 CE)



Before embracing Islam, he was a typical figure of the age of ignorance, with a ruthless and savage character. After being blessed with faith he became altruistic, self-controlled, and meticulous about the law. His harsh and brutal character evolved into a merciful and tender one.

‘Umar رضي الله عنه (r. 634-644 CE)

Hadrat ‘Umar رضي الله عنه, was an exemplary Muslim in all his dealings, and he staunchly followed the glorious way of the Messenger of Allah.

Before embracing Islam, he was a typical figure of the age of ignorance, with a ruthless and savage character. After being blessed with faith he became altruistic, self-controlled, and meticulous about the law. His harsh and brutal character evolved into a merciful and tender one.

As caliph, he was a highly responsible person who always maintained the peace of the Muslim community. He would say, “I fear that Allah may ask me about it if a sheep is lost by the river Euphrates.”¹⁷ In the evenings he used to go around the neighborhoods of the city carrying supplies on his shoulders to help orphans and the needy. He was not satisfied in spirit until he consoled broken hearts, wiped tears from eyes, and made the downcast smile. He was so aware of what he had been entrusted with that he worked hard, day and night, to fulfill his task. Yet he was never content with his service. He was never at ease. However,

17 Ibn Abi Shaybah, *al-Musannaf*, VIII, 153.



he always followed the Prophet and is renowned as a just and praiseworthy caliph, for he was in awe of his responsibility.

He did not die a natural death, but was attacked by an unstable person and died of his injuries. As he lay dying, people asked him to nominate a successor. He said, "Shall I bear responsibility for you even after I die? I expect no reward for being your caliph. I only hope that my good performance of duty may balance out my bad performance. I want neither of them to overbalance the other. I will be happy as long as I am not questioned on the Day of Judgment!"¹⁸

When people suggested that he nominate his son `Abdullah to follow him as caliph, he said, "One victim is enough from one family!"

The basic goal of this venerable Companion was to ensure the wellbeing of the Muslim community. He forgot his own problems as he took on the community's problems, turning them into his constant concern. He strictly followed the example set by the Prophet. He never forgot how the Prophet suffered and struggled to succeed in the way of Allah, and he followed in the Prophet's sacred track and managed to find the right way.

His ascetic life-style

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ used to sleep on a simple straw mat. Hadrat `Umar ؓ, cried when he saw the print of the hard mat on the body of the Prophet. When the Prophet asked him why, he replied, "O Messenger of Allah! It is well-known that the king of Persia and the king of the Byzantines live in comfort. You deserve better, for your office is greater than theirs."

The Prophet answered, “Would you not prefer us aim at the next world, while they aim at this one?”¹⁹

The most notable feature of `Umar’s caliphate was the vast expansion of Islam. Along with the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, and what is today Iran also came under the protection of his government. The wealth of the Byzantine and Persian empires began to flow into Medina, and the standard of living of the Muslim community began to improve. Yet `Umar ؓ maintained the same style of life that he had followed before. Though his state grew in splendor and its treasuries were overflowing, he kept on giving the Friday sermon in patched clothes. He lived a humble life to protect himself from the seduction of his lower self.

In a famous incident, when `Umar ؓ traveled to Damascus to put the new Islamic government on a firm footing after the conquest of Syria, he was accompanied by only a single attendant, and rode only a single camel. He suggested to his attendant that the two of them ride the camel by turns. The attendant rejected the offer, saying that people would be confused. Yet `Umar ؓ insisted, and made the man get on the camel. As the turns fell out, when the two of them entered Damascus, the servant was riding and the ruler was walking. This event is a concrete example of egalitarianism in Islam that has remained in the common mind of the Muslim community for centuries.

Though he governed an empire, he kept its public funds separate from his private funds. He used to get into debt and faced difficulties in life. He accepted only a small allowance from the treasury, and living on that amount, led a hand-to-mouth

19 Muslim, al-Talaq, 31.

existence. He lived so humble a life that many visitors did not grasp that he was, indeed, the great Caliph `Umar ؓ.

Notable people among the Companions finally became impatient with his position, and wanted to increase his allowance. His character was so formidable that they held back from telling this to him directly. Instead, they discussed it with Our Mother Hafsa ؓ, who was a revered widow of the Prophet as well as `Umar's daughter. They asked her to raise the matter with her father. When she proposed it to him, `Umar ؓ reproached her. He had seen the Prophet starving, without even a single date to eat.²⁰ "O daughter! How did the Prophet live?" he asked.

Hafsa replied, "He had only as much as he needed."

`Umar ؓ said, "My two friends and I are like three travelers. The first [the Prophet] reached his place. The second [Abu Bakr] reunited with the first by following the same path. And I, as the third, want to join them. If I go over-laden, I won't be able to catch them! Don't you want me to be the third traveler on this path?"²¹

`Umar's only aim was to please Allah. He was so focused upon this goal that he never felt that he was overcome by misfortunes and troubles: he had unfailing fortitude. Though the Prophet, during his lifetime, had given `Umar ؓ the good news that he would go to Paradise, `Umar ؓ always worked so as to deserve Paradise.

`Umar's love for the Prophet

One day, during the Prophetic era, `Umar ؓ asked permission of Muhammad ﷺ to go on Pilgrimage. The Prophet

²⁰ Muslim, *al-Zuhd*, 36.

²¹ Sehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *al-Tarh al-Islam*, I, 367.

replied, smiling, “O brother! Pray for us as well!”²² `Umar ؓ was moved. “I was overjoyed with such a compliment,” he said. Even a hint of praise coming from the Prophet was priceless to him. The following example displays the depth of `Umar’s affection for the Messenger of Allah.

There was a Companion named Firas ؓ who loved the Prophet dearly. Because of his love, he wanted a keepsake from the belongings the Prophet. One day he saw the Prophet eating from a dish. He wanted to keep that dish for himself, so he asked for it. The Prophet, who never rejected a request, gave the dish to him.

In later days, `Umar ؓ would visit Firas ؓ at home from time to time. He would ask Firas to bring out the dish the Prophet gave him. He would pour *zamzam* water from the holy spring at Makka into it. Then he would drink the water, and wipe his face and hands with it. He considered that it was blessed, since the Prophet had touched it.²³

`Umar ؓ, the distinguisher between truth and falsehood

One of Hadrat `Umar’s titles was *al-Farûq*, the distinguisher between truth and falsehood.

Allah says in the Qur’an: “O you who believe! If you are careful of [your duty to] Allah, He will grant you a distinction...” (Anfal 29). `Umar ؓ, whose heart was gripped by fear of Allah, solved problems with justice all the time by sorting the good and the evil into their appropriate places. Even his early judgments were known for their consistency with verses of the Qur’an that

22 al-Tirmidhi, *al-Da`awat*, 109; Abu Dawud, *al-Witr*, 23.

23 Ibn Hajar, *al-Isabah*, III, 202.



were subsequently revealed. This virtue of Hadrat `Umar ؓ is mentioned in one of the sayings of the Prophet: “Allah Almighty endowed the tongue of `Umar ؓ with what is just.”²⁴ The Prophet also said, “In earlier communities there used to be individuals who received divine inspiration. If there were such a one among my people, it would definitely be `Umar ؓ.”²⁵

Hadrat `Umar ؓ, was a determined man, and he expressed his determination many times. The most striking example of this concentration was an outright miracle.

One day, Hadrat `Umar ؓ was giving a sermon from the pulpit. All of a sudden he cried out, “Toward the mountain, toward the mountain!” These words had nothing to do with the topic of the sermon. But when `Umar ؓ said these words, Sariya, his commander in chief, was in the midst of a battle a long way away. He later reported that he had heard the words “Toward the mountain!” in `Umar’s voice. He turned his forces toward the mountain and was able to head off an enemy attack.²⁶

By the grace of Allah, `Umar ؓ was granted divine blessing and became a monumental figure standing for righteousness and justice. In his presence, evil powers had no chance of seducing people into sin. Within his sphere of influence, there was no place for injustice and cruelty. The Prophet, therefore, said to `Umar ؓ, “I swear by Allah Almighty that if Satan encountered you, he would walk another way.”²⁷

24 Tirmidhi, *al-Manaqib*, 17/3682.

25 Bukhari, *al-Ashab al-nabi*, 6.

26 Ibn Hajar, *al-Isabah*, II, 3.

27 Muslim, *al-Fada'il al-sahabah*, 22.

Actions speak louder than words

Hadrat `Umar ؓ passed on a great deal of wisdom to guide the faithful. For example, he advised, “Do not judge anyone according to how many prayers he says or how many fasts he keeps. Judge according to whether he speaks the truth, guards what is entrusted to him, and respects the difference between lawful and unlawful.”²⁸

These words of `Umar ؓ show that true prayer and fasting lead us to refrain from all evil acts. Prayer or fasting by someone who does not work to train his lower self will bring no benefit. Such prayer or fasting will receive no blessing, and so will not keep one from evil and mistakes.

Hadrat `Umar ؓ reproved certain people who stopped working for a living, claiming, “We are the people of trust in Allah.” He told them, “You do not trust in Allah, but in the property of others. The true people of trust are those who plant their seeds, and then trust in Allah.”²⁹

A man was speaking in praise of someone. Hadrat `Umar ؓ asked, “Have you ever traveled with him? Have you ever been a neighbor to him? Have you ever traded with him?” The man gave negative answers to all these questions. And Hadrat `Umar ؓ said, “I swear by Allah that you do not know that man.”³⁰

The most important point for the judgment of people is, as our ancestors said, that actions speak louder than words. If you build a firm character and develop a spiritual personality, the fact will make itself apparent in your interpersonal relations and your

28 al-Bayhaqi, *al-Sunan al-Kubra*, VI, 288; *al-Shu`ab*, IV, 230, 326.

29 Ibn Rajab, *Jami` al-`ulum*, I, 441.

30 al-Ghazzali, *al-Ihya`*, III, 312.



other undertakings, as well as in what you say. The quality of a person's actions was therefore the most important principle that guided Hadrat `Umar's approach to life.

He said, "Among people whom I do not know, the most beloved to me is the one who has a good name. Among people whom I do know, the most beloved to me is the one who has a good manner. Among people who I am examining, the most beloved to me is the one who speaks the truth."³¹

A life honored by the Qur'an

Hadrat `Umar ؓ was very anxious to show respect to the Qur'an. It is said that it took him years to apply the principles he found in the second chapter of the Qur'an, Sura Baqara, to his life. When he felt that he had managed to internalize those principles, he slaughtered a camel to thank Allah.³²

It had, in fact, been some words of Qur'an he had listened to in the house of his sister that had brought him to embrace Islam in the first place. After that, he made his best effort to grasp the meaning of the Qur'an and to live his life accordingly. The endeavor gave him great pleasure. Thus he became a staunch follower of the Qur'an and the sunna of the Prophet. Since he lived a life full of Islamic wisdom, he has become a role model for vast numbers of Muslims.

When Hadrat `Umar ؓ died, `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud ؓ said in great sorrow, "Nine out of ten of the learned folk now have gone."

31 Ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Manaqib*, 219.

32 al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami'*, I, 40.

Some Companions who heard him objected, “Among us we have other learned folk!”

He replied, “I am talking about the learned who have spiritual wisdom!”

Hadrat `A'isha ؓ also spoke well of `Umar ؓ to the Companions. She advised, “Adorn your circles by saying words of respect to the Prophet and mentioning Hadrat `Umar ؓ.”³³

Hadrat `Umar ؓ interpreted the morality of the Prophet with wisdom and steadfastly endeavored to serve the way of Allah. Here are some words of wisdom from him.

Words of wisdom from Hadrat `Umar ؓ

“It is easier to stop sinning than to continue repenting.”

“The one I love most is the one who tells me my faults.”³⁴

“The one who speaks most, makes most mistakes. Whoever makes many mistakes loses his sense of embarrassment about them. Whoever loses his sense of embarrassment about errors does not think twice about what Allah forbids and what He permits. Such a person’s heart is deemed to be spiritually dead.”

“If it was not a claim of knowing future, I would bear witness about five kinds of people who will go to Paradise. They are a poor person with many children who remains patient and thanks Allah; a wife who pleases her husband; a wife who voluntarily returns her marriage gift to her husband; a child that pleases its parents; and a sincere penitent.”

33 Ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Manaqib*, 276.

34 al-Suyuti, *Tarikh al-khulafa'*, 130.



“I have seen all kinds of friends, but I have not found any better friend than watching your tongue. I have seen all kinds garments, but I have not found any better garment than chastity and abstaining from forbidden things. I have seen all kinds of wealth, but I have not found any better wealth than satisfaction with what you have. I have seen all kinds of favors, but I have not found any better favor than advice. I have seen all kinds of food, but I have not found any better food than patience.”

“Making friends is half of intelligence. Asking questions is half of knowledge. Taking measures is half of life.”

“This world is nothing when compared to the next. It is nothing more than a rabbit’s jump.”³⁵

“Whoever avoids empty talk is granted wisdom. Whoever avoids nosiness is granted modesty. Whoever avoids the taste of food is granted the taste of prayer. Whoever avoids frivolity is granted grandeur. Whoever avoids foolishness is granted honor. Whoever avoids the love of this world is granted the love of next world. Whoever avoids bemoaning other people’s faults is granted the ability to correct his own faults. Whoever avoids prying into the secrets of Allah’s transcendent attributes is granted a chance of staying clear of doubt.”

“Ten things do not ripen without another ten: intellect without chastity; virtue without knowledge; salvation without fear; government without justice; dignity without decency; comfort without security; wealth without giving charity; poverty without frugality; sovereignty without humility; effort without divine guidance.”

³⁵ Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Musannaf*, VIII, 152.

“One who does not show mercy is not shown mercy. One who does not forgive is not forgiven. One who does not keep away from sins cannot reach the level of full submission to Allah.”³⁶

“Prayer hovers between earth and heaven. It does not ascend until the Prophet is praised.”³⁷

“Let only those who are knowledgeable sellers of religion trade in our market.”³⁸

“Praising someone to his face is like slaughtering him.”³⁹

Hadrat `Umar ؓ wrote to his governors, “To me, prayer is your most important work. He who observes prayers in time will keep his religion. He who does not observe prayers will lose his religion soon.”⁴⁰

Qadi Shurayh wrote to Hadrat `Umar ؓ asking how he should judge. Hadrat `Umar ؓ answered, “Judge by what you find in the book of Allah. If you cannot find a reference in it, go to the practice of the Prophet. If you cannot find a reference in the two, then judge by the principles displayed by righteous servants of Allah. If you still cannot find a reference, either make up your mind yourself or stop there. If you ask me, the second is better for you.”⁴¹

“Prosperity and poverty are both bridle-paths. I do not care which one I take.”

36 Bukhari, al-Adab al-Mufrad, p. 415, no. 37.

37 Tirmidhi, al-Witr, 21.

38 Tirmidhi, al-Witr, 21/487.

39 Ibn al-Qutayba, al-Masa'il, p. 14.

40 al-Muwatta, al-Wuqut al-salat, 6.

41 al-Nasa'i, al-Qudat, 11/3.



“The most intelligent person is the one who judges human actions well.”

“I can tell a person’s level of intelligence by the questions he asks.”

“Do not put off today’s work until tomorrow.”

“Once a task is postponed, it is difficult to move it forward again.”

“One who does not know what the Devil is easily falls into the Devil’s trap.”

“Do not incline to the world. Then you may live freely, unenslaved by your ego.”

“If you do not live what you believe, you will begin to believe what you live.”

“You cannot manage to correct people unless you correct yourself.”

“The most ignorant of men is the one who throws away his own afterlife for the worldly advantage of others.”

“The noble side of a favor is to do it without delay.”

“The hidden witness of an evil act is our conscience.” (A man asked the Prophet what was evil. He replied, “Turn to your heart to find out what is evil! Good rejoices the heart, and your heart will call upon you to pursue it. Sin creates anxiety and unease in the heart, even if other people call upon you to pursue it.”⁴²)

“One who conceals his own secret can manage himself.”

“Try to be powerful without violence, and to be gentle without weakness.”

42 Ibn Hanbal, IV, 227-228.



Hadrat `Umar ؓ, with all his spiritual wisdom and insight, used to pray, “O Allah! I seek refuge with You not to carry me away suddenly, not to let me go astray, and not to count me among the careless!”⁴³

Every night it was Hadrat `Umar's private observance to question himself closely about what he had done that day.<sup>44</sup> We would profit from following this custom in order to spiritually train ourselves. We might well take upon ourselves the practice of Hadrat `Umar ؓ and ask ourselves every night, “What have I done in the Way of Allah today?” Muslims need to be careful not to be ignorant of our worldly and otherworldly missions. We should question ourselves about these well in advance of our final questioning by Allah.

May Allah help us to render an easy account of our life on the Day of Judgment! May Allah help us to live a life adorned with good deeds and deserving of eternal blessing in the Hereafter! May Allah grant us the special attribute of Hadrat `Umar ؓ, known as al-Farûq, and permit us to distinguish between truth and falsehood.

Amîn...

43 Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Musannaf*, VII, 82.

44 al-Ghazzali, *al-Ihya'*, IV, 728.

`Uthman رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ

(r. 644-656 CE)



`Uthman ؓ was a very generous, wise, gentle, bashful, lowly, and soft-hearted man. The Prophet said that among the Companions, `Uthman's personality reminded him the most of his own.

Hadrat `Uthman ؓ was martyred while fasting and reading the Qur'an. He was over 80 years old. He was stabbed, and his blood fell upon this verse: "... So Allah will suffice you against them, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing." (Baqara 2:137).

‘Uthman (r. 644-656 CE)

Hadrat ‘Uthman , the third of the four caliphs, was a Companion who both served the Prophet and was his son-in-law twice over. He continued to serve Islam during the lifetimes of his two predecessors in caliphal office, Hadrat Abu Bakr and Hadrat ‘Umar , before being elected to the caliphate himself.

Possessor of Two Lights (*Dhûn-Nurayn*)

Hadrat ‘Uthman , was shattered when his wife Rukayya , the noble daughter of the Prophet, died. When the Prophet asked him about the intensity of his grief, he said, “O Prophet! No one has lost as much as I have. Not only must I say farewell to my beloved wife, but the bond of kinship between you and me no longer exists.” When his relatives suggested to him that he might marry again, he declared, “I cannot take anyone else after the Prophet as my father-in-law. I cannot marry anyone after his daughter!”

The Prophet was touched by this outburst of love and commitment. When some time had passed, he arranged for ‘Uthman , to marry another of his daughters, Umm Kulthûm . Umm Kulthûm  also died during ‘Uthman’s lifetime. The Prophet



told him, “If I had a third unmarried daughter, I would marry her to you as well.”⁴⁵ Such were his words of special love for `Uthman ؓ.

`Uthman ؓ was a very generous, wise, gentle, bashful, lowly, and soft-hearted man. The Prophet said that among the Companions, `Uthman’s personality reminded him the most of his own.⁴⁶ `Uthman ؓ was a silver-tongued man, the most eloquent of the Companions. He spoke little, but what he said was always wise.

A monument of modesty and compunction

`Uthman ؓ was an exemplar of modesty and compunction. Even angels felt inferior to `Uthman ؓ with regard to these traits.⁴⁷

One day, while the Prophet was having a chat with Our Mother `A’isha ؓ in their private quarters, Abu Bakr ؓ asked their permission to join them; he was immediately admitted. Then `Umar and Sa`ad ibn Malik ؓ asked to come in, and were welcomed in the same way. But when Hadrat `Uthman ؓ asked permission, the Prophet tidied himself up and asked `A’isha ؓ to withdraw behind the curtain before he greeted their latest visitor.

Hadrat `Uthman ؓ joined the conversation for some time, and then left. After he left, Hadrat `A’isha ؓ asked the Prophet, “When my father Abu Bakr and other Companions joined us, you did not straighten yourself up or ask me to step back. Yet

45 Ramazanoglu Mahmud Sami, *Hiz. 'Uthman Zinnureyn*, 12.

46 Ramazanoglu Mahmud Sami, *Hiz. 'Uthman Zinnureyn*, 13.

47 Ahmad, I, 71; VI, 155.

when `Uthman ؓ came, you both straightened yourself up and asked me to step back.”

The Prophet ﷺ replied, “Even the angels straighten themselves up when they see `Uthman ؓ. How could I do otherwise? I swear by Allah that the angels put themselves in order when they see `Uthman ؓ just as they do when they see Allah and His messenger. If you had been with me when `Uthman ؓ came in, he would have been unable to speak a word or lift a finger.”⁴⁸

`Uthman ؓ, that monument of modesty and compunction, said, “Protecting the eye from illicit sights is the best containment for lustful desires.” He always tried to train people in this regard.

The Companion Anas ؓ, said that one day, while he was on his way to visit Caliph `Uthman ؓ, he noticed a woman in the street, and was attracted by her beauty. When he came to `Uthman ؓ, he heard to his surprise, “O Anas! You enter my presence with signs of adultery in your eyes.”

Anas ؓ felt ashamed. “Does revelation continue after the Prophet?” he asked.

Hadrat `Uthman ؓ answered: “No. This is nothing but insight.”⁴⁹

One day, Hadrat Ali ؓ, brought some water to the Prophet for ablution and asked, “O Messenger of Allah! Who will be the first person to be questioned on the Day of Judgment?”

The Prophet replied, “It will be I. I will remain before Allah as long as I like, and will leave there with all my sins forgiven.”

Hadrat Ali ؓ asked again, “Who will come next?”

48 Ramazanoglu Mahmud Sami, *Hiz. `Uthman Zinnureyn*, 143-144.

49 al-Qushayri, *al-Risala*, Beirut, 1990, 238.

The Prophet answered, "Next will come Abu Bakr ﷺ. He will remain before Allah as long as he likes, and he too will have his sins forgiven."

Hadrat Ali ﷺ asked again: "Who comes, then, as the third?"

The Prophet replied, "Then comes `Umar ﷺ. He will stay remain Allah as long as he likes, and he will have all his sins forgiven as well."

Hadrat Ali ﷺ asked yet again, "And who comes fourth?"

The Prophet replied, "It is you who will follow `Umar. ﷺ"

Hadrat Ali ﷺ asked: "When is `Uthman ﷺ ibn Affan's turn?"

And the Prophet answered, "'Uthman ﷺ is a bashful person. I prayed to Allah not to question him, and my prayer has been answered."⁵⁰

I will not stay where the Messenger of Allah is not allowed

Hadrat `Uthman ﷺ, loved the Messenger of Allah more than himself. He regarded all his words as commands. Before the treaty of Hudaibiyya was signed, when the Prophet, at the head of an army of pilgrims, arranged a truce with the idol-worshippers of Makka, `Uthman ﷺ was sent to Makka as the envoy of the Prophet. He told the idol-worshippers that the Muslims encamped outside their city would only visit the House of Allah in Makka and then turn back to Madina in peace. The idol-worshippers did not agree to admit the pilgrims, but they invited `Uthman ﷺ to visit the Ka`ba himself. He declared, "I cannot visit the Ka`ba if the

`Uthman ؓ (r. 644-656 CE) 

Prophet is not allowed to do so! I can only visit it after he does. I will not stay where the Messenger of Allah is not allowed.”⁵¹

The idol-worshippers were not pleased. A rumor spread in the Muslim camp that `Uthman ؓ had been martyred. The Prophet obtained approval from the Companions to fight for `Uthman's sake. He put one of his hands on top of the other to indicate how close he felt to `Uthman ؓ, and exclaimed, “O Allah, this approval of the Companions is for `Uthman ؓ. He indeed is in Your service and the service of Your messenger!”⁵²

The rumor was false, however, and before long the idol-worshippers sent an envoy to make peace. `Uthman ؓ returned safe and sound.

Sun of generosity

`Uthman ؓ is a symbol not only of loyalty, but also of generosity. He used to say, “Wealth is only good for the grateful and generous,” and he used to act according to what he said. He set free, or led other people to set free, hundreds of slaves.⁵³

Before the battle of Tabuk, which was one of the critical battles for the Muslims, He donated 300 fully-equipped camels and a thousand dinars to the army. The Prophet remarked, “The generosity of this gift will make `Uthman ؓ protected from whatever he does.”⁵⁴



51 Ahmad, IV, 324.

52 Bukhari, al-Ashab al-nabi, 7.

53 Ramazanoglu Mahmud Sami, Hz. `Uthman Zinnureyn, 163.

54 Tirmidhi, al-Manaqib, 18/3700; Ahmad, V, 63.



When `Uthman ؓ migrated from Makka to Madina, he found that the Muslims of Madina were suffering from lack of water. The water of most of the wells in Madina was not drinkable. Only one well, named *al-Ruma*, currently had drinkable water. It was owned by a member of one of the Jewish tribes of Madina, who was selling its water to the Muslims.

The Prophet asked his people, “Who wants to buy the well of al-Ruma and trade it for a better one in Paradise?”

Hadrat `Uthman ؓ went off to purchase the well on the spot, but the owner rejected his offer. Hadrat `Uthman ؓ, however, negotiated with him, and managed to buy a half share in the well, so that the Muslims and the Jews could both access water freely on an every-other-day basis. Later on, he bought the whole well. The Prophet asked him if he would be willing to give away the well of al-Ruma as charity, and he accepted the idea right away. After that, there were no more water shortages in Madina.

It is narrated that Hadrat `Uthman ؓ himself used to line up to draw water from the well that he had once owned, just other people did. It is also narrated that this generosity led to the revelation of the famous Qur’anic verse,

O soul at peace! Return to your Lord well-pleased, well-pleasing. Enter among My servants; enter into My garden. (Fajr/89: 27-30).



When Islam began to spread rapidly and the number of people who visited Madina multiplied, the Prophet’s mosque was not spacious enough for the congregation, and many people pitched their tents around the mosque. The Prophet announced,



`Uthman ؓ (r. 644-656 CE) 

“Whoever extends our mosque by even one yard will go to Paradise!”

Hadrat `Uthman ؓ said, “O Prophet! May all my property be sacrificed for you! I would like to have the honor of extending the mosque.” Then the following verse was revealed:

*Only he shall build the mosques who believes in Allah and the Last Day, who keeps up prayer and pays the poor-rate and fears none but Allah. (As for) these, it may be that they are followers of the right course. (Tawba 9:18)*⁵⁵



Hadrat Ali ؓ sent his shield to market in order to make money for his wedding to Hadrat Fatima ؓ. Hadrat `Uthman ؓ recognized that it was Hadrat Ali's shield. He called over the porter and asked, “How much is the owner of this shield asking for it?” The porter said the price was 400 silver dirhams. Hadrat `Uthman ؓ gave the porter 400 dirhams, added another 400 dirhams, and gave him back the shield, along with a message to deliver to Ali ؓ: “No one deserves this shield more than you do! The extra amount is for your wedding expenses. I hope you will excuse us for this.”⁵⁶



Here is another incident that illuminates the noble character of Hadrat `Uthman ؓ, our model of generosity.

55 Ramazanoglu Mahmud Sami, Hz. `Uthman Zinnureyn, 145.

56 Ramazanoglu Mahmud Sami, Hz. `Uthman Zinnureyn, 139.



During the government of Hadrat Abu Bakr ؓ, a famine occurred in Madina. Hadrat `Uthman ؓ imported wheat, which arrived carried by a hundred camels. People rushed to buy it. Some offered much more than the going price. But Hadrat `Uthman ؓ said, "I am only selling to someone who pays more than you are offering." Upon hearing Hadrat `Uthman's words, the Companions went to Abu Bakr and complained. Hadrat Abu Bakr ؓ realized what Hadrat `Uthman ؓ had in mind. He said, "Don't rush to think of `Uthman like that! He is the son-in-law of the Prophet; the two of them will be friends in Paradise. Perhaps you misunderstood."

So they went back to Hadrat `Uthman ؓ together. Abu Bakr ؓ said, "`Uthman, the Companions are upset by what you said."

Hadrat `Uthman ؓ replied: "Yes, O caliph of the Prophet! They offered me only seven times more than the going price. But I am selling the wheat to Someone who pays seven hundred times the going price." And he donated the entire wheat shipment to the poor people of Madina, along with the meat of all the hundred camels: all sacrificed for Allah.

Abu Bakr ؓ was delighted. He kissed `Uthman ؓ on the forehead, saying, "I understood in the first place that the Companions had got you wrong."⁵⁷

A lover of the Qur'an

The character of Hadrat `Uthman ؓ had been enlightened by the spirit of the Revelation. He was indeed a lover of the Qur'an.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 140.

`Uthman ؓ (r. 644-656 CE) 

He remarked, “I was made to love three things in this world: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and reading the Qur’an.”

During the caliphate of Abu Bakr ؓ, the chapters of the Qur’an had been assembled in a loose collection with no specific order. When Hadrat `Uthman ؓ became caliph, he asked a group of Companions to organize the Qur’anic material in a specific order; he also produced many copies of this newly organized Qur’an. In the year 30 AH he sent a number of these copies to important centers of the world: they became master-copies available for reference. This act of Hadrat `Uthman ؓ prevented the emergence of differing versions of the Qur’an.

It was Hadrat `Uthman’s custom to kiss the Qur’an as soon as he woke up every morning. He said: “I hate missing the chance of reading the Qur’an every day and every night.”⁵⁸ He read the Qur’an so often so that he wore out two copies in his lifetime.

Abdur-Rahman ibn `Uthman al-Taymi said, “One night, at his office, Hadrat `Uthman ؓ recited the entire Qur’an in a single cycle of prayer.”⁵⁹

Commitment and modesty

It was their characters and their principles that elevated the famous Companions of the Prophet to the level of stars in the spiritual skies. Though after the triumph of Islam they were all rich, they lived humble and modest lives simply for the sake of following the way of the Prophet.

58 *al-Kanz*, I, 225

59 Ramazanoglu Mahmud Sami, *Hiz. `Uthman Zinnureyn*, 144.

Hadrat `Uthman ؓ, wore inexpensive ordinary clothes, but they were always clean. He would sleep on the ground in the mosque after the noon prayer, so that the marks of stones were often found on his body. He offered delicious feasts to people, but contented himself with vinegar and olive oil to season his private meals. He spent whole days fasting and whole nights praying, yet he never imposed upon his servants to prepare ablution water outside of their working hours.

Hadrat `Uthman ؓ was very watchful about treating people justly. Abul-Furat ؓ related a representative incident. “Hadrat `Uthman ؓ once asked his servant to pull him by the ear, because he had done the same to that servant once upon a time. When the servant grasped Hadrat `Uthman’s ear, he asked him to pull it harder, saying that retaliation was limited to formal exactness in this world, but it would not be so limited in the next.”⁶⁰

`Uthman ؓ the martyr

Muslims were successful in conquering many new lands during the caliphate of Hadrat `Uthman ؓ. Muslim rule was established in Cyprus, Tabaristan, Tripoli, and Armenia, and Muslim armies attacked the islands of Rhodes and Malta, as well as the great Byzantine capital, Constantinople. The biggest part of the Byzantine armada was destroyed in the Mediterranean Sea, and Muslim sea trade ventured to many new places. Such movements prospered all the people of Muslim lands, as well as enriching the treasuries of the state.

The dramatically increasing prosperity made some people prefer the pleasures of this world, and political controversies

over the control of the new wealth and power began to arise. The struggle became a widespread crisis of government. Finally, insurgents from Egypt, Basra, and Kufa gathered in Madina and laid siege to the dwelling of Hadrat `Uthman ؓ. The blockade was so severe that they debarred him from the water of the well which he himself had bought and donated for the benefit of Muslims.

Hadrat `Uthman ؓ expressed the grief he felt, and warned with great insight against the troubles that would follow. He said, "I am like the father of sons who do not obey him when they are alive, and who will still cause him anxiety after their deaths." When the Companions who supported him suggested that he raise an army to destroy the rebels, he declined, as he did not want to introduce violence into the community. He told them, "I prefer dying of persecution to instigating bloodshed."

`Uthman ؓ endeavored to give advice to the rebels, but it was of no use. Ultimately they broke into his house and killed him.

Hadrat `Uthman ؓ was martyred while fasting and reading the Qur'an. He was over 80 years old. He was stabbed, and his blood fell upon this verse: "... So Allah will suffice you against them, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing." (Baqara/2:137).

The Prophet ﷺ once said: "I swear by Allah that `Uthman will intercede with Allah to save seventy thousand Muslims from the fires of Hell."⁶¹

May Allah help us grasp the meaning of the wisdom of Hadrat `Uthman ؓ.

61 al-Daylami, *al-Firdaws*, 4/360.

Words of wisdom from Hadrat `Uthman

“The wisest of people question and govern their lower selves, perform good deeds for the Next World, and make use of Allah’s glory to guard against the darkness of the tomb.”

“Let Allah’s servant fear Him, so as not to be resurrected blind, though now he has eyes! One meaningful word is enough for the wise. Those who are spiritually deaf cannot hear anyway...”

“Five things are the signs of the righteous. They keep company with those who work for religion. They govern their desires and guard their tongues. They distinguish between good and bad uses of wealth when others are inclined to forget Allah and indulge themselves. They live modest lives and avoid devouring the unlawful. They think others are likely to be saved, while they are likely to be lost.”

“True Muslims have six types of fear. The first is fear of losing their religion. It is said in the Qur’an: ‘Our Lord! Make not our hearts to deviate after You have guided us aright’⁶² and ‘O you who believe! Be careful of (your duty to) Allah with the care which is due to Him, and do not die unless you are Muslims.’⁶³

“The second is fear of being disgraced by the records the angels have written of their worldly deeds. It is said in the Qur’an: ‘On that day the earth shall tell her news, because your Lord had inspired her.’⁶⁴

“The third is the fear of having their good deeds invalidated by the Devil. It is said in the Qur’an: ‘He said: My Lord! Because You have made life evil to me, I will certainly make (evil) fair-seeming

62 `Al `Imran/3: 8.

63 Al `Imran/3: 102.

64 Zilzal/99: 4-5.

to them on earth, and I will certainly cause them all to deviate, except Your servants from among them, the devoted ones.’⁶⁵

“The fourth is the fear of being captured by the angel of death with no preparation. It is said in the Qur’an: ‘And serve your Lord until there comes to you that which is certain.’⁶⁶ The Prophet said: ‘Man dies as he lives, and he is resurrected and questioned as he dies.’⁶⁷

(It is worth noting that Hadrat `Uthman ؓ lived fully obeying the principles displayed in the Qur’an, and was martyred and reached Allah while reading the Qur’an.)

“The fifth is the fear of losing themselves in this world’s pleasures and forgetting the Hereafter. It is said in the Qur’an: ‘... and the life of this world is nothing but a provision of vanities.’⁶⁸

“The sixth is the fear of pursuing family advantage and forgetting Allah. It is said in the Qur’an: ‘And know that your property and your children are a temptation, and that Allah is He with whom there is a mighty reward.’”⁶⁹

“The world is indeed ephemeral, but the Hereafter is eternal. Do not let what is ephemeral lead you astray and keep you away from the eternal. Prefer the eternal to the ephemeral. This world is finite: you will all return to Allah. Fear Allah.”⁷⁰

“Try to do all good deeds before death reaches you.”

65 Hijr/15: 39-40.

66 Hijr /15: 99.

67 Muslim, al-Jannah, 83; al-Munawi, V, 663.

68 Al `Imran/3: 185.

69 Anfal/8: 28.

70 Ibn Abi al-Dunya, *al-Mawdu`a*, I, 77.

May Allah help us to act according to these principles, and grant us the blessing of the distinguished companionship of Hadrat `Uthman ؓ. May Allah engrave his love in our hearts and make us a neighbor to Hadrat `Uthman ؓ in the Hereafter!

Amîn...





Ali رضي الله عنه
(r. 656-661 CE)



“Both the world and religion will be preserved as long as the following four things are preserved: as long as rich people are not miserly with their wealth; as long as learned people act according to what they know to be true; as long as ignorant people do not pride themselves on what they do not know; and as long as poor people do not prefer the life of this world to the life of the next.”



Ali عليه السلام (r. 656-661 CE)

Hadrat Ali عليه السلام has the privilege of being born in the precincts of the Ka`ba.⁷¹ His family was very crowded, so from the age of five he was raised in the compound of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, benefiting from his companionship even before his prophethood was announced. In this way Ali عليه السلام was safeguarded from the habits of the Age of Ignorance, and became the first among children to accept Prophet Muhammad's message.

After receiving revelation, the Prophet used to visit the fairs around Makka where people gathered for pilgrimage to the Ka`ba, with the purpose of inviting people to the way of Islam. He would take either Hadrat Ali عليه السلام or Hadrat Abu Bakr عليه السلام with him. When the Prophet did not take Hadrat Ali عليه السلام with him, Ali عليه السلام would go to the Ka`ba and deface the idols there.

Hadrat Ali عليه السلام, played a great role during the Hijra, the Emigration of the Prophet. When Muhammad ﷺ secretly left Makka for Madina, Ali عليه السلام slept in his bed, thereby diverting the attention of the idol-worshippers who had planned to murder Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and were lying in wait outside his house.

71 al-Hakim, *al-Mustadrak*, III, 549.



When the Prophet left Makka, it was to Hadrat Ali ؑ that he entrusted the valuables given to him for safekeeping, so that Ali ؑ could return them to their owners. Hadrat Ali ؑ, after fulfilling this mission, left for Madina as well. It was a difficult journey. He walked at night and rested by day, and his legs grew swollen. However, he was united with the Prophet in Madina safe and sound.

In the second year of the Hijra Ali ؑ married Fatima ؑ, the Prophet's daughter, and became the Prophet's son-in-law. With Hadrat Fatima ؑ, Ali ؑ lived a life of devotion and commitment. From the two of them sprang a lineage of eleven distinguished descendants of the Prophet. This lineage was called *Ahl al-Bayt*, the People of the House. All of them were significant figures in *tasawwuf*, sufism.

Master of the Bountiful

Raised in the bosom of the Prophet, Hadrat Ali ؑ never inclined to worldly affairs. Consequently his life was an example of Islamic solidarity and altruism.

The Prophet once said, "When Allah blesses His servant, He opens the way for that servant to serve humanity." (Suyuti, II, 4/3924)

Reflecting on this great divine favor, Hadrat Ali ؑ replied, "There are two blessings, and I cannot say which one makes me happier. The first is when someone comes to me for help with the hope that I will provide him with what he wants from me.

The second is when Allah helps that person through me. I prefer helping a Muslim to a world made of gold or silver.”⁷²

One day Hadrat Ali ؑ said to his noble wife Fatima ؑ, “I’m starving. Have we got anything to eat?” Hadrat Fatima ؑ answered that they had nothing to eat, but there were six dinars in the house. Hadrat Ali ؑ took that money and went to the bazaar. On the way to the bazaar he heard one man scolding another. The first man was demanding that the second man pay what he owed; he was threatening to take him to court. The borrower asked more time from the lender, but the lender rejected his plea.

Hadrat Ali ؑ interrupted and asked, “How much money are you fighting about?” The two responded that it was six dinars. Hadrat Ali ؑ paid the lender the whole amount, and headed home with nothing. On the way back he wondered what he would tell Hadrat Fatima ؑ. In the end he decided, “She won’t be angry with me. She is the chief of women, and the daughter of the Prophet! She’ll be tolerant of what I’ve done.”

When he told Hadrat Fatima ؑ what had happened, she said, “That is a noble act. May Allah be praised! You saved a Muslim from imprisonment. Allah is enough for us.” She was upset, though: both their sons were crying out of hunger. Hadrat Ali ؑ sensed her state, and was upset himself. He went to visit the Prophet, thinking that he would forget what had happened once he entered that spiritual presence.

On the way to the Prophet’s house, he saw a man approaching, accompanied by a camel. The man said, “I’m selling this camel. Would you like to buy it?” Hadrat Ali ؑ told him that he had no money. The man kept pressing him, however, and finally Hadrat

72 Ali al-Muttaqi, *al-Kanz al-`Ummal*, VI, 598/17049.

Ali ؑ bought the camel for a hundred dinars, on credit. Then he moved on.

As he continued, another man approached him and offered to buy the camel. He offered Hadrat Ali ؑ three hundred dinars, and the deal was done. With part of the money from the sale of the camel, Ali ؑ bought some food and went home. He told Hadrat Fatima ؑ what had happened; they ate, fed the children, and thanked Allah.

Afterwards Hadrat Ali ؑ went on to see the Prophet. The Prophet asked him, “O Ali ؑ! Do you know from whom you bought the camel and to whom you sold it?”

Ali ؑ replied, “Allah and His messenger know the best.”

The Prophet said, “The seller was the Angel Gabriel, and the buyer was the Angel Israfil, who will blow the trumpet of summons on the last day of the world. That camel came from Paradise. You helped a Muslim in distress, and Allah gave you many times your investment in return. No one knows what He will give you in the Hereafter.”⁷³



‘Ata (May Allah have mercy with him) narrates from Ibn ‘Abbas ؓ:

“Hadrat Ali ؑ agreed to irrigate a date orchard in return for a certain amount of barley when the work was done. In the morning he got what was owed him and came home. With a third of the barley the family cooked a meal called *hazira*. Just

as the food was ready, a poor person came to the door, asking for something to eat. Ali and Fatima ؑ gave their meal to that poor person. They cooked another meal with another third of the barley. Just as the food was ready, an orphan came to the door, asking for something to eat. They gave that meal to the orphan. Then they cooked another meal with the last third of the barley. Just as the food was ready, a prisoner of war came to the door, asking for something to eat. They gave that meal to the captive, and spent the day hungry.

Another narrative of Hadrat Ali and Fatima ؑ relates that during one Ramadan, for three days in succession the couple gave their fast-break food to a poor person, an orphan, and a captive, and themselves broke their fast with water alone. It is in relation to this noble act that the following verses are said to have been revealed:

And they give food out of love for Him to the poor and the orphan and the captive. We only feed you for Allah's sake; we desire from you neither reward nor thanks. Surely we fear from our Lord a stern, distressful day. Therefore Allah will guard them from the evil of that day and cause them to meet with ease and happiness (Insan/76: 8-11).⁷⁴

Because of this noble morality, Prophet Muhammad ؐ gave Hadrat Ali ؑ the title *Master of the Bountiful*.

Victorious Lion of Allah

Hadrat Ali ؑ was distinguished not only by generosity and deep knowledge, but also by outstanding courage. He took part

74 al-Wahidi, *al-Asbab al-Nuzul*, 470; al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf*, VI, 191-192; al-Razi, XXX, 244.

in all but one of the armed struggles for the survival of Islam, and became renowned as a heroic figure in every battle he entered. He missed just one campaign, the battle of Tabuk. The Prophet asked him not to come out for Tabuk, but to watch over the community and the members of the Prophet's family at Madina. This upset Hadrat Ali ؑ. He complained, "O Prophet! Are you leaving me behind to take care of women and children?"

The Prophet answered with these consoling words: "You are in the same position to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that there will be no prophet after me."⁷⁵

It was the custom of the Arabs to call their most famous warriors to step forward for single combat as a prelude to the general engagement of both sides in battle. The Prophet usually asked Hadrat Ali ؑ to undertake such single combats. With Allah's will, he bested every opponent. He was, therefore, widely known by the title *Victorious Lion of Allah*.

The heroic performance of Hadrat Ali ؑ was no doubt rooted in the spiritual inspiration of the Prophet. For Muhammad ﷺ once said, "The real hero is not the person who prevails over his rival in combat. The real hero is the person who controls himself in times of anger."⁷⁶ Hadrat Ali ؑ was a good example of the sort of real warrior pointed out by this saying of the Prophet. He lived a life in which he triumphed over his ego all the time.

In one battle, Ali ؑ was about to kill a soldier from the army of the idol-worshippers. On the verge of death, that soldier spat in his face. Hadrat Ali ؑ stopped, put down his sword, and told the man to get up and go. The soldier was astounded. He asked Hadrat

75 Ramazanoğlu Mahmud Sami, *Hz. Aliyyu'l-Murtaza*, 54.

76 Muslim, *al-Birr*, 107.

Ali ؑ why, when he held all the power and had been insulted, he was giving his opponent another chance. Hadrat Ali ؑ answered, “We fight two kinds of battles. The first is against idol-worshippers like you; the second is against our lower selves. That battle requires us to control our passions. I had been fighting against you only for the sake of Allah. When you spat in my face, it made me angry. If I had killed you in that moment, it would have been to satisfy my own rage, and my lower self would have triumphed over me. That is why I set you free. I have won the great battle, the battle with my own lower self. To be a slave in the hands of the lower self is greater danger for Muslims than the attacks of idol-worshippers.”⁷⁷

With this answer, Hadrat Ali ؑ raised the veil from the heart of the enemy soldier. The man was enlightened with faith, and became a Muslim. Later this new Muslim took part in many battles at the side of Hadrat Ali ؑ. He followed Hadrat Ali’s teaching, differentiating carefully between anger for the sake of Allah and anger for the sake of one’s own passions. He gave the battle against his lower self priority over fighting any other enemy.

Hadrat Ali ؑ was a heroic warrior, yet never ceased living a life of spiritual commitment and deep devotion. During one battle, he was shot through the leg with an arrow. His supporters attempted to remove it from his leg, but Ali ؑ couldn’t bear the operation because the pain was so severe. Finally he told them, “Let me stand in prayer. When I am in the midst of prayer, pull the arrow.”

They followed his instruction, and took out the arrow easily. When Ali ؑ finished his prayer, he asked them whether they had been successful! Prayer removed him from the possibility of pain. He used to pray as if he had already departed from the world.

77 Ramazanoğlu Mahmud Sami, *Hiz. Aliyyu’l-Murtaza*, 117.

From the Ka'ba to the Mosque of Kufa

Hadrat Ali عليه السلام, did his best to help the caliphs who governed the community after the death of the Prophet. He joined their councils and helped them make well-directed decisions.

He himself was appointed caliph by the Companions of the Prophet after the assassination of the third deputy, 'Uthman عليه السلام. One of his early administrative acts was to transfer the capital from Madina to Kufa, because he did not want the city of Madina, the Illuminated City of the Prophet, to witness political conflict. His decision was correct, for his caliphate had to bear witness to civil war (often called *al-Fitna*, "The Trial") and there was political struggle in Kufa to the end of his life.

Once his supporters appealed to him, "Commander of the Faithful! Let us be your guard!"

He answered, "There is no guard better than death." Eventually, he was tragically assassinated by a former supporter, a political extremist.

Ali عليه السلام lost his appetite a few days before his death. When asked why he did not eat, he answered: "I want to die hungry." Shortly afterwards, he was stabbed to death with a poisoned sword while leading morning prayers. He was 63 years old, the age of the Prophet at his own passing.

As Ali عليه السلام lay dying, Jundab ibn 'Abdullah said to him, "O Commander of the Faithful! May Allah save you for us. But if you leave us, we will offer an oath of allegiance to your son Hasan."

With great insight, Hadrat Ali عليه السلام took the position taken by Abu Bakr عليه السلام before him: "I will not tell you whether or not to offer homage to Hasan. You know your own affairs better than I do."

He next advised his sons, Hasan and Husayn. “I want you to devote yourself to the way of Allah,” he said. “Do not mourn over the past. Tell the truth all the time. Follow the guidance displayed in the Book of Allah. Be an enemy to oppressors, and a friend to the oppressed. Do not allow yourselves to be offended by words of condemnation concerning the rules of religion.”⁷⁸

After leaving this spiritual testament, he uttered the Profession of Faith, and passed away. He closed his eyes forever in a prayer-hall that he himself had first opened by the Ka`ba, in whose precincts he had been born.

Mu`awiya, who had challenged Hadrat Ali ؑ during his government and brought on the civil war, became the fifth caliph, and ruled as a king. The community of Islam entered a different phase. Later Mu`awiya repented what had happened. He publicly spoke of his regret: “I wish I had lived as an ordinary man of Quraysh in the valley of Dhi-Tuwa, and had never gotten involved in politics.”⁷⁹

Junayd al-Baghdadi, the great mystic of Islam, remarked, “If Ali ؑ had not been forced to spend time on battles he would have taught us more of the Qur’anic sciences. He is the master of scholars. He gave voice to insights that so far have not been attainable by anyone else.”⁸⁰

Here are some words of wisdom from Hadrat Ali ؑ, inviting us to follow his principles of life.

78 Ramazanoğlu Mahmud Sami, *Hiz. Aliyyu'l-Murtaza*, 74.

79 Ibn Athir, *al-Bidaya*, VIII, 135.

80 Ramazanoğlu Mahmud Sami, *Hiz. Aliyyu'l-Murtaza*, 113.



Words of Wisdom from Hadrat Ali ؓ

“Rest your soul with words of wisdom, for souls get tired and weaken, as bodies do.”

“There is no goodness in praying without standing in awe of Allah, in fasting without refraining from idle talk, in reading the Qur’an without contemplation, in learning without acting accordingly, in wealth without charity, in fellowship without offering help in need, in blessings without gratitude, and in invocation without sincerity.”

“People are opposed to what they do not know.”

“Paradise is for the generous, while Hell is for the ignorant.”

“The ignorant will not be questioned about why they did not learn until after the learned are questioned about why they did not teach.”

“Whoever yearns for Paradise pursues good works. Whoever fears the Fire refrains from passions. Whoever takes death seriously dispenses with the desires of his ego. Whoever is aware of how the world works knows what the obstacles are.”

“Chastity is the charity due for beauty.”

“Decency and generosity in religion are fruits of common sense.”

“More intellect means less speech.”

“Whoever grasps that he will be questioned for his words as for his acts will speak less, and not at all about things that do not concern him.”

“Not speaking until asked is better than speaking until silenced.”



“Do not bother responding to a base accusation, because the one who made the accusation is likely to answer back with worse.”

“Do not make jokes with fools, for they may break your heart with their poisonous tongues.”

“Speak to people in a language they can understand.”

“A curved object will have a curved shadow.”

“Think well of the servants of Allah. If you do so, you will rid yourself of many burdens.”

“Whoever does not follow the way of Allah, His Prophet, and the friends of Allah is destined to have no capital. The way of Allah is to keep the secret. The way of the Prophet is to manage relationships with good behavior. The way of the friends of Allah is to put up with problems that come from people.”

“If you want to become good friends with someone, first spend some time with him. If he still sympathizes with you when you have spent time together, then establish a relationship with him.”

“A person whose heart is occupied with hatred cannot do good works, because no heart is spacious enough to contain two opposite concerns.”

“A Muslim should smile even if his heart is sad.”

“Eternal blessing is only possible when one dies surrendered.”

“How can the son of Adam grow arrogant? His beginning is a drop of fluid, and his end is a corpse. He can neither create his own conditions nor escape extinction.”

“Life is made up of only two days. One day is for you; the other day is against you. Do not spoil yourself when the day is for you, and do not wail when it is against you.”



“Today is the day to do good works. Tomorrow is the day to account for your works. There will be no chance of further action then.”

“Every breath is a step towards death.”

“Both the world and religion will be preserved as long as the following four things are preserved: as long as rich people are not miserly with their wealth; as long as learned people act according to what they know to be true; as long as ignorant people do not pride themselves on what they do not know; and as long as poor people do not prefer the life of this world to the life of the next.”

“How lovely when the rich humble themselves to the poor, hoping for the reward of Allah! But the poor do an even better job by resigning themselves to Allah, which makes them independent of the rich.”

“Being deprived of something is better than being indebted to somebody.”

“Virtue is the adornment of poverty; gratitude is the adornment of wealth.”

“Meanness gathers up in itself all kinds of bad characteristics.”

“When you grow poor, make a business deal with Allah by giving alms. When you grow rich, thank Him. Try to retain Allah’s blessings by thanking Him all the time.”

“The gift of Islam is better than any worldly wealth. Commitment to religion is better than any worldly concern. Advice from death is better than any worldly advice.”

“Knowledge is the best of inheritances. Decency is the best of arts. Prayer is the best of investments. Good works are the best of mentors. Good character is the best of friends. Gentleness is the best



of assistants. Frugality is the best of possessions. Contemplation of death is the best of protectors."

"There is no better trade than doing good deeds; no better benefit than divine guidance; no better dignity than humility; no better honor than knowledge; no better chastity than abstaining from what is sinful; no better character than coming closer to Allah; no better prayer than performing obligatory religious acts; no better intellect than foresight; no better virtue than solidarity."

"Here are the most difficult deeds, done at the most difficult times: to forgive while angry; to be generous while in need; to exercise self-control while no one watches; to speak truth to people one fears or needs."

"If someone exaggerates small nuisances, Allah will expose him to bigger ones."

"Possessions are the raw material for passions. Passions unlock troubles. Jealousy rides people to pointless exhaustion."

"Worldly cravings and expectations blind even foresighted people."

"Your worth is equal to what you desire."

"One who becomes a slave of his ego's endless desires is bound to do bad deeds."

"The foreordained goes to those who do not expect it."

"There is no better place for your soul than Paradise. So trade your soul only for Paradise."

"The friends of Allah are those who can see the inwardness of life while looking at its outwardness."



“A servant’s faith cannot ripen unless he trusts in Allah more than he trusts whatever he has.”

May Allah help us to take in these words of wisdom and to act in accordance with them. May He grant us the love of the four caliphs, the closest friends of the Prophet, and unite us with them on the Day of Judgment!

Indeed, union with our companions of the Hereafter starts already in this world. If we make friends with the noblest souls of this world, we will no doubt be close to them in the Next. May our Lord help us to take on the morality of the four caliphs, and let them intercede for us on the Day of Judgment!

Amîn...



On Society and Rulers

Allah Almighty provided His creatures with a great societal order of life appropriate to the traits of them all. Our Lord wished humans, whom He created as the most honored of creation, adorned with both material and spiritual beauties, to live in harmony with the whole. Thus it is said in the Qur'an, *"And the heaven, He raised it high, and He set up the balance, that you might not transgress the balance."*⁸¹

Our Lord created the human being to be more dependent on other human beings than most creatures are dependent on each another. Humans have always been inclined to live in communities, from clans to empires: we do not live in isolation. In order to guide this inclination in a harmonious way, it is essential to have leaders who can steer society wisely, and who are capable of maintaining a balanced relationship between those who govern and those who are governed.

When societies are examined with wisdom, it can be seen that governors and governed are mirrors reflecting each other's images. Thus, all societies, from a nuclear family or a small group to an empire, take shape in parallel with the physical and psychological capacities of their rulers. At the same time, rulers develop as persons in parallel with their society's overall

81 Rahman/55: 7-8



capacities. If those who govern are virtuous and skillful, their society prospers in an atmosphere of peace and welfare. If they are not, their society flounders in material and social distress. On the other hand, if a society improves, it develops righteous rulers; if a society goes astray and loses its moral values, selfish rulers come to power, because rulers are also the outcome of the entire social system.

Therefore, when things are not going well, both governors and governed should take responsibility for their own failures first, and start by improving themselves. The primary social principle of the Islamic mystical tradition is to examine one's own behavior closely while tolerating the behavior of others. This approach is valid not only for personal development, but also for societal development. It is said in the Qur'an:

... Surely Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change it themselves... (Ra'd 13:11)

and

This is because Allah has never changed a favor that He has conferred upon a people until they have changed their own condition... (Anfal 8:53).

As it is made clear in these verses, the divine mercy and blessing with which a society is endowed are conditional on that society's remaining on the right path. Whenever a society ignores Allah's grace, Allah's mercy departs from it. And then, as the Prophet remarked, "In that place, it is better to be under the ground than above it."

So if we wish to live in a good society with righteous rulers, we should live our own lives in a manner that pleases Allah. For



as the Prophet once warned, “People are ruled as they deserve.”⁸² The following story makes this point.

When Hadrat Ali  was stabbed to death by the extremist Ibn Muljam, people rushed to his side. Some of them asked him, as he was drawing his last breaths, to appoint a leader for them. But he told them, “I am leaving you in the same way that the Messenger of Allah left us. Before the Prophet died, we asked him to do the same thing that you are asking me. He told us, ‘Allah will give you good leaders if He sees good in you.’ And Allah gave us Abu Bakr  as our leader because He saw good in us.”⁸³

Many troubles emerged during the government of Hadrat Ali . He was once asked: “O caliph! Why is that more troubles have occurred under you than occurred under your predecessors?”

Hadrat Ali  replied, “They served as rulers for people like me, while I serve as a ruler for people like you!”

By these words he meant that rulers can only govern according to the quality of their subjects. Yet the same principle applies to subjects, whose acts are conditioned by the quality of their rulers. Hadrat `Umar  said in this regard, “People follow the path and manner of their leaders. People follow the straight path as long as their leaders follow the straight path.”⁸⁴

Indeed, people generally follow their leaders and take examples from them. Here are some illustrations from history.

Walid ibn Abdul-Malik, an Umayyad caliph, was keen on majestic buildings. His people copied him and began to value

82 al-Suyuti, *al-Jami` al-Saghir*, II, 82.

83 al-Hakim, III, 156/4698.

84 Ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Manaqib*, 223.



majestic buildings. Then in every circle and walk of life, people began to talk about majestic buildings.

Sulayman ibn Abdul-Malik, another caliph, loved elegant food and drink. People of his era wasted their time talking about food and drink.

`Umar ibn Abdul-Aziz, another caliph, was a committed and pious person. People of his time valued devotions. They talked about prayer and competed over how many verses from the Qur'an they had memorized, how many extra fasts they had kept, and how many needy people they had served.⁸⁵

Indeed, the acts and characteristics of rulers are internalized by their societies sooner or later. Thus the good deeds of rulers influence society widely in a positive way, while their bad deeds influence society widely in a negative way. As the proverb says, "Fish start to stink from the head."

Since this is so, governors and leaders of every kind, from heads of households to directors of associations and corporations, and from local officials to national administrators, should pay utmost attention to setting a good example. They should be aware of their responsibilities. Sheikh Edebali said to `Uthman Ghazi, "Never forget that being in the upper class will not make you safer than being in the lower class."

When Hadrat `Umar ؓ put a public ban on some behavior, he used to begin by exercising that rule in his family first. He would ask his family members to come together and make the following announcement: "I have just forbidden the people this and that. People watch over you as wild birds watch over flesh. If

85 Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *Kıyas-ı Enbiya ve Tevarih-i Hulefa*, İstanbul, 1976, I, 717; Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam wal-Muluk*, Cairo 1939, V, 266-267.

you do not obey this rule, they will follow your example. I swear by Allah that if one of you ignores this ban, I will punish that person more than I punish any other person. Now you are free to obey or not to obey.”⁸⁶

It is a notable fact that a society advances in all aspects only when its rulers fulfill their mission with great care. These instructions of Sulayman the Magnificent, the great Ottoman Sultan, to Governor Ghazi Bali Bey show how seriously he took the work of government.

Watch over your people. If governors are righteous and pious, their society will follow them. Your people are nothing but your reflection. There are some people who fast by day and pray by night, yet love the wealth of this world too much. Worldly possessions then become the idols they worship. Nothing compares to worldly possessions for leading society astray. Never incline to accumulating wealth! Spend generously whatever you have in hand for people, and do not allow yourself to grow jealous.

The Prophet’s stand and his acts set good examples for rulers as well. He paid close attention to the problems of the Companions, and always took the brunt of difficult situations. Even the most famous warriors, like Hadrat Ali , stated that they took shelter with the Prophet at dangerous and risky times. Thus, leadership means taking the lead in making sacrifices. Leaders must be aware that one cannot serve properly without being fully involved.

The Prophet walked along with the weakest Companions to encourage them during long journeys. A merciful shepherd does

86 Ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Manaqib*, 266.



not leave an injured sheep behind. On the contrary, he cradles it in his arms.

Community leaders should avoid becoming spoiled. They should never forget that they are servants of Allah. Leaders do the job of cashiers, distributing benefits that do not belong to them, and one day they will be questioned about their honesty in the divine court.

Imam Malik wrote this advice to the caliph of his time:

Hadrat `Umar ؓ, made the Pilgrimage ten times. As far as I know, he spent only twelve dinars on each Pilgrimage. He slept not under a tent, but in the shade of a tree. He carried his leather milk bag on his own shoulder. He wandered around to find out and solve the problems of needy people. When `Umar ؓ was injured, the Companions rushed to see him and began to praise him. `Umar ؓ, told them, "Whoever believes this kind of praise is undoubtedly deceived. If I had a world made of gold, I would give it away to be free of the fear of the Last Judgment."

Imam Malik continued:

Hadrat `Umar ؓ always acted justly. The Prophet gave him the good news that he would be among the dwellers in Paradise. Yet he never rested on this good news, but always labored to do his best in governing the affairs of the Muslims. If such a ruler as Hadrat `Umar ؓ thought this was necessary, I cannot think what rulers like yourself had ought to do!

The sensitivity and modesty of Tariq ibn Ziyad, the conqueror of Spain, also sets a good example. With an army of only five thousand soldiers, he triumphed over an army of ninety thousand. When the war was over, he walked through the treasuries of the king of Spain and said to himself, "O Tariq! Yesterday you were a

slave with a strap on your neck. One day, Allah set you free. Then you became a commander. Today, you conquered Spain. Now here you are in the palace of the king. Be aware! Never forget that tomorrow you will stand before Allah.”

Those who are in charge of a society should regard themselves as slaves employed to meet that society’s needs. My father, the late Musa Efendi, was of the opinion that leaders of society, as servants of the people, were obliged to treat them with mercy, modesty, and affection, and should not allow themselves to become drunk with pride because of their prestigious position. He said:

“Those who serve people in religious matters should be aware that the opportunity of service for religion is a blessing from our Lord. Not many can have this opportunity. There are many people who have every quality needed for serving religion, but they cannot have that chance for accidental reasons, like lack of time and space. So those who serve should be thankful to those whom they serve, since they provide them with such a chance.”

In times when rulers had spiritual consciousness in societal matters, societies improved in both the material and spiritual sense. Rulers can manage this only by taking heed of wise scholars and wise people, and also by having a capable advisory body.

This being the case, rulers should not allow flatterers to brainwash them. They should consult wise counselors who are capable of discerning and raising the real problems of people, and who can suggest strategies for solving them. Consultation with capable advisors is a tradition of the Prophet. Even though he was a messenger of Allah, the Prophet always took the advice of knowledgeable people. In this way he set an example for us.



In order for a peaceful society to be possible, those who are governed must submit to their governors, as long as these govern justly. People should, however, monitor their rulers, and warn them when they go astray.

When he became caliph, Hadrat `Umar ؓ asked the assembly, “O people! I wonder what you would do if I do not govern justly?”

One man answered, “O `Umar! If you go astray, we will bring you back to the right path with our sword!”

Hadrat `Umar ؓ replied, “May Allah be praised that I have friends to guide me if I go astray!”

Hadrat `Umar ؓ said on another occasion, “The person I like best is the one who tells me my faults.”⁸⁷

Rather than being disdainful when people tell them about their faults and failures, rulers should be open to people’s warnings and criticisms, and use them to help to reorganize themselves in a better way. Meanwhile, ordinary people are supposed to warn rulers sincerely, for the sake of Allah, and also make sacrifices for the benefit of everyone. Responsibility rests not only on the governing few, but on all the individuals who make up a society.

It is a grave religious error not to warn rulers but to tolerate their mistakes. It is a graver error to support them in injustice and oppression. Those who follow unjust rulers in this world will follow them in the Hereafter as well. Everyone should be very careful about whom they follow.

It is said in the Qur’an:

⁸⁷ al-Suyuti, *Tarikh al-Khulafa’*, 130.



(Remember) the day when We will call every people with their leader; then whoever is given his book in his right hand, these shall read their book; and they shall not be dealt with a whit unjustly. (Isra' 17:71).

and

He (Pharaoh, as he led his people to the sea to be drowned in this world) shall lead his people on the resurrection day, and bring them down to the Fire; and evil the place to which they are brought. (Hud 11:8).

Thus, to guide those who govern in good directions is part of the responsibility of people of faith. The great jurist Imam Abu Yusuf wrote his book on taxation, *Kitab al-Kharaj*, to advise Caliph Harun al-Rashid. In it he wrote,

“Never lose your enthusiasm for establishing justice within the sphere of sovereignty Allah has granted you. The happiest shepherd on the day of our judgment before Allah is the one with whom his flock is pleased. Never go astray! If you do, your people will follow you in the same direction. Never give orders arrogantly, nor judge angrily. When you face a dilemma where you must choose this good of this world or the good of the next, choose the good of the next. Do not forget that this world is transient, while the next world is eternal.”⁸⁸

Since people copy the attitudes and behaviors of their rulers, and rulers also adopt attitudes and behaviors according to the taste of their people, every private person and every member of government should make an effort to stay in the path of the righteous. The talent of a mechanic may be understood from the

88 Abu Yusuf, *Kitab al-Kharaj*, Bulak 1302, p. 3-4.

state of the machine he repairs. A machine that a mechanic cannot repair is proof of his ineptitude. Society is also a kind of machine. The governors of a society are its mechanics. When things are persistently wrong with it, they should regard themselves as responsible. This is true not only for those at the very top, but for all the members of a government. Rulers must be alert to the wrong acts of the people in their administrations, and watch over their weaknesses and faults.

It is almost impossible to find someone who is happy as he is, and almost everybody blames that on other people's shortcomings. Yet all of us, governors and governed, should be thinking about our own shortcomings. When we increase the number of good people in a society we are trying to improve, that society will improve spontaneously, both materially and spiritually. It will then, with divine help, promote better rulers to power. Meanwhile, if rulers are not happy with their societies, they had better question themselves and endeavor to improve themselves rather than complaining about their people.

Murad I, who was martyred at the battle of Kosova, was an Ottoman sultan who combined the worldly and the spiritual sultanates in his heart. He sets an example for questioning oneself first. Murad found his army in the middle of a stormy battlefield in Kosova. It was so stormy that the line of sight was very short, and there was extraordinary confusion and carnage. Murad prayed two cycles of prayer and sought refuge in Allah. "O Lord," he prayed in tears. "If this stormy weather is because of my sins, please do not punish these sinless soldiers because of me! Please do not let me cause their deaths!" The storm ceased, and his army won a great victory. Afterwards, Murad began to supervise the care of the dead and wounded on the battlefield. During his



tour of inspection he was stabbed to death by an injured Serbian soldier.

Society advances, with the help of Allah, only through our questioning and improving ourselves. There are, of course, exceptions to prove the rule. For example, Allah sent messengers to introduce reform when the masses went astray. Thus, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was sent expressly to transform a merciless and quasi-wild society that worshipped idols and buried its daughters alive. This was a blessing from Allah. It is not possible to explain this intervention of Allah by examining the nature of pre-Islamic Arab society. The only explanation for the manifestation of divine law is Allah's grace.

We cannot, however, expect a new door of that sort of blessing to be opened. After the coming of the Seal of the Prophets, Muhammad ﷺ, the sending of messengers was complete. Now human beings are left with the mission of improving spiritually by ourselves.

We have plenty of opportunities to improve ourselves spiritually. One of our priorities in this respect should be to enliven our institutions for the education of future leaders. A wise person observed, "The most important difference between major nations and minor ones is the existence of a group of well-educated people." It requires a group of thoroughly educated people to satisfy a society both materially and spiritually. Only the properly educated can eliminate terror and establish a just society.

All human enterprises take shape and gain importance according to the personalities and characters of those who move them forward. Only individuals of good character and strong personality are qualified to lead masses of people well. Only



great leaders can bring out the greatness of a society. Therefore it should be our top priority to educate such future leaders. The late Turkish poet Necip Fazıl said in this regard, “A tree that does not sprout is nothing but dead wood.” And friend of Allah remarked, “Give birth to the ones you need!”

Muslims need to prepare new generations with firm faith, awareness of history, and readiness to serve the Ummah. Otherwise, it is a divine law that Allah will take back the blessings previously granted. The chronicles of other nations offer vivid witness to this principle on many of their pages.

If we first of all engrave love of Allah and His messenger in our own hearts, we will be able to educate a new generation of leaders who love them also, and who will be capable of making sacrifices for the nation. Only then will society be able to observe how real Muslim identity may be established.

May our Lord grant that Muslim leaders in all governing bodies, high and low, develop a keen and responsible awareness of their task! May Allah help us all to bring up faithful generations who will work earnestly to advance society both materially and spiritually, serving our nation and all Muslims throughout the world!

Amîn...